

MIKE SHAYNE



MYSTERY MAGAZINE

JANUARY, 1969

VOL. 24, NO. 2

NEW MIKE SHAYNE SHORT NOVEL DIE LIKE A THIEF

by BRETT HALLIDAY

Who had stolen that case of priceless jewels? There wasn't much to go on, Mike Shayne decided. But one thing he did know. The thief had killed to get them, and was ready to kill again. A bullet in the redhead's shoulder told him that.

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UNDER A COLD SUN

by JACK RITCHIE

It was a house of fear, peopled with lost souls. But it was my only real home. I would do a lot to keep it that way. Even kill . . .



IT HAD BEGUN snowing. Gusts of flakes swirled across the exercise yard. It was not quite four, but already dark enough to light the lamps.

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I went back to my desk and sat down. I took the snub-nosed .38 from the top drawer and broke it open to check the six bullets again.

One should be enough, but you could never tell.

Could I think of myself as The Avenging Angel?

I smiled slightly.

The inter-com buzzed and Hackett, my inmate-secretary, announced that Assistant Warden Frawley was here for our daily conference.

I closed the gun and put it into my pocket.

When Frawley came in, I motioned him to a chair, as usual. And, as usual, I gave him permission to light one of his cigars.

He's a competent, hard-working man, I thought, and tomorrow he'll have my job.

"Nothing special today, Warden," Frawley said. "Except that one of the guards wants to quit."

I nodded. "Carson. I had a talk with him. The usual reason. He can get twice as much money doing something else."

Hackett brought our coffee and the cream and sugar.

Frawley remembered something else. "Kapinski's on a hunger strike again."

"Forget it," I said. "They never last more than two or three days until he finishes the chocolate bars he's squirreled away someplace."

But Frawley knew about that too. He knew just about as much

about the place and the people in it as I did.

Would he abolish the late afternoon conference when he took over? Actually there was seldom anything that called for it. But it was a nice break toward the end of the day.

I almost asked him, but—no, that would be interfering.

My eyes went to Hackett, pouring the coffee.

Gray-haired now. He'd been here about as long as I had. But in this case there was no mandatory retirement age.

Frawley sipped his coffee. "Well, by this time next week, you'll at least be someplace where it's warm."

I put sugar into my cup.

How often had I studied the travel literature? Florida, California, New Mexico. How often had I dreamed of sitting in the sun?

How long had it been since I'd been fishing? Almost twenty years? Just about the time Bob went off to college.

My eyes went to the window and across the yard to the lights of the warden's house, the only civilian building within the walls. Only a few of those left now, I thought. In the old days they used to be common, but they're not included in the new plans anymore.

When I had become warden fourteen years ago, I had moved

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into the big house. It consisted of two stories, with a cavern of an attic, and the one hundred year-old building contained twelve high-ceilinged rooms.

In its time, more than a dozen wardens and their families had occupied the building. Children had been born here and some of its people had died here.

But I was alone and I woke often in the night, sometimes wandering through the empty rooms, and once even going up to the attic.

After two weeks, I moved out.

I had one of the file rooms off my office emptied and a bed, dresser, and a few chairs installed. The room was small and plain and it viewed the drabness of the yard, but for my purposes, it was sufficient.

Re-reading the regulations, I discovered that there was no official impediment to allowing the assistant warden and his family to occupy the warden's house and I so informed Frawley.

He, his wife, and their four children moved into the building immediately. They were quite thankful, since the building was offered rent-free and—though there was nothing so authorized in black and white print—it was customary to see that the house was well-staffed with inmate servants, from cook to baby-sitters.

After the novelty of the first years, however, Frawley's wife



availed herself of every opportunity to leave the prison enclosure. She seemed depressed by her surroundings, and I thought that if it weren't for the circumstances of a rent-free home and the servants, she would have insisted upon moving back outside the walls.

Now I sipped my coffee. "I've been going over some figures. Did you know that our average lifer here lives six years longer than a person on the outside?"

Frawley smiled. "It's the regular hours, the nourishing food, the medical care, and no opportunity for bad habits."

I nodded. "Six extra years of life. Is that a punishment? Or a reward?"

He thought about that. "For the ones who get used to their cells, it's a reward."

My phone rang, and Evans, at the reception section, informed me that the van had pulled in with today's new prisoners. I lis-

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tened for a few more moments and then cradled the phone.

"The van's in," I said.

Frawley was interested. "Is Tragon with the batch?"

"Yes," I said.

Charles P. Tragon. Gardener and handy man. One day he had walked into a man's home and tied up the owner, his wife, and their three children. He had ransacked the house and when he had not found enough money, he had shot them all, one by one.

Frawley apparently thought about that too. "Makes you wish we still had the death penalty."

I said nothing.

He puffed his cigar. "In the old days, you got the chair for practically anything." He shook his head. "I won't say that was right, but why do people always go from one extreme to the other? Now nobody gets the chair. Nobody at all. No matter what damned thing he's done."

I studied my teaspoon. "And you think Tragon should be executed?"

Frawley nodded. "Him and at least a dozen others we're pampering here." He put down his cup. "Should we go down and take a look at Tragon?"

We found our overcoats and walked hunched against the driving snow to the reception wing. It was here that we processed the new prisoners—giving them their physical, psychological and in-

telligence examinations and quarantining them for thirty days.

The prisoners were lined up at the reception desk when Frawley and I entered the building. We stood to one side and watched the entry process.

Tragon proved to be a tall, thin-shouldered man who seemed to smirk.

I felt the hackles rise at the back of my neck.

Suppose I shot Tragon? Right here.

My eyes went to the wall clock. It was almost four-thirty.

I licked my lips. Strange how one kept putting off what had to be done, even though a few hours really made no difference one way or the other.

I stared at Tragon again. Was that smirk bravado? Contempt? Or was it really fear?

Whatever it was, he would end up in the small wing off Cell Block C.

And probably six years would be added to his life.

I forced my eyes away from him and watched a young guard stifling a yawn.

How old had I been when I'd left my home town and come down here as an apprentice guard? Twenty-three? Yes, that was it.

And I'd been depressed by everything I'd seen and felt here—the walls and their long shadows, the steel bars and plates, the smell

of a desolate and forgotten community—but jobs had been scarce and you had to be thankful for anything you could get.

I had put in almost three years when my brother-in-law died, leaving my sister, Margaret, alone with three small children.

I took a week's leave and went back up-state. After the funeral, I spent the rest of the week looking for a job in the area, but with no success.

Margaret and I made an evaluation of her situation: She had a fairly large equity in the house which she occupied and the benefits from her husband's insurance policy brought her a small monthly check. Remaining where she was, and with my financial help, she could make a go of it.

I returned to my job at the prison and my room in the village just outside the walls. It was a large room, though somewhat dim and to the rear of the house. However, my hours at the prison were long and I put off looking for another until the thought occurred only rarely. When I finally moved into the warden's house, all my possessions fitted without much trouble into two medium-sized trunks.

During the years, whenever I had more than a weekend, I drove back north to visit Margaret and her family.

In the beginning, I had hoped that I might be able to join Mar-

garet and the children. But job opportunities there failed to materialize. Instead, I began receiving promotions here—based partly on merit, but more solidly upon the fact that there is always a large turnover in prison personnel—until finally it became apparent that, simply from an economic point of view, it would be foolish to leave my job.

Yes, Margaret—we—had done well with the children.

Bob was now a lieutenant colonel stationed in Vietnam and Raymond had a fine medical practice out on the coast.

And Emily had married that lumberman in Canada and Margaret now lived with them.

I served under a number of political appointee wardens until the entire penal system had been placed under Civil Service and then it was almost inevitable that I continued up the ladder until I assumed the post of warden.

Now Frawley and I watched the new prisoners led away and we stepped outside again. We made our way to the welcome warmth and light of Cell Block C.

It was one of our newer buildings. The cells were larger and better equipped.

We stopped for a moment at the open doorway of Unit 10. There were still bars on the windows of the large bright room, but there was only one guard and his job was more to arbitrate what petty

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Here we kept the old ones who were long past their punishment. They were all in their late seventies or older and they played with their checkerboards and their dominoes and read the bound newspapers.

They spent the morning and the

them do pretty much as they wanted to their cells.

Some of them were bare, without any item which had not been issued or which was standard to the cell. Others were almost one room apartments, some even including curtains and Venetian blinds.

The cells were empty now and

Next Month:

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Another Sensational New TRUE Crime Gangland Thriller

by DAVID MAZROFF

Whenever the killer packs gathered in Chicago, whenever a man had to die—Johnny Torrio's name came up. Born a killer, bred to murder, cavernous, ascetic Johnny knew the ways of Murder and the price of any man's life. Without this little monster Al Capone would have remained a two-bit hood, with him Scarface became King of Death! Don't miss this incredible true story!

afternoon hours in this room and in the evening returned to their cells.

I knew them all. Some were still bright of eye, but others dozed and to them life was now the tedious distance between two meals.

Frawley and I continued past a row of individual cells.

If the prisoners behaved, we let

the men at their jobs but I had walked here many times in the evening and seen the people in them—some sullen, some lying on their bunks staring the hours away.

And there were others—the ones under the glow of lamps, working at their correspondence courses on watch repair, or lapidary, or whatever.